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Framing German and global politics over three decades

A quantitative content analysis of the journalistic work of Helmut Schmidt

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Abstract

The former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (1918-2015) continued his political work as a publicist at the country's most influential weekly *Die Zeit*. Using a content analysis and a subsequent cluster analysis, we apply quantitative methods to discover how Schmidt framed German and global politics in the historic context of the last three decades. The paper's aim is to show the value of frame analysis for communication history research and reveal frame dynamics and statics over time. Our findings illustrate Schmidt's historically grown view on economic and political developments, which he promoted in his new office. Especially his successor Helmut Kohl (1930-2017) is often criticized and treated as a cause for many political problems, particularly in the 1990s. However, Schmidt's journalistic work is not only influenced by his own political biography, but also by the historic context of his time, such as the German reunification. Overall, Schmidt's journalistic work is shaped by a) his political dispositions and b) the journalistic routines he adapted to at *Die Zeit*.

Frames deutscher und internationaler Politik über drei Jahrzehnte. Eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse des journalistischen Wirkens von Helmut Schmidt

Der ehemalige Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt (1918-2015) verfolgte seine politischen Interessen und Ziele auch als Mitherausgeber bei der *Zeit* weiter. Auf Basis einer Inhaltsanalyse und einer Clusteranalyse wird in diesem Beitrag untersucht, wie Schmidt die deutsche und globale Politik der letzten drei Jahrzehnte kommentiert und kritisiert. Der Beitrag zeigt den Nutzen von quantitativer Framing-Forschung für die kommunikationshistorische Forschung und legt Framedynamiken und -statiken offen. Der Altkanzler nutzte spezifische, in seiner Biographie begründete Frames, die seine journalistischen Kommentare zu ökonomischen und politischen Entwicklungen strukturierten. Seinen Nachfolger Helmut Kohl (1930-2017) macht er in den 1990er Jahren beispielsweise wiederholt für politische Krisen verantwortlich. Das Framing des Altkanzlers wurde aber nicht nur von seinem persönlichen Werdegang, sondern auch vom historischen Kontext, wie etwa der deutschen Wiedervereinigung, geprägt. Es ist beeinflusst von a) persönlichen politischen Dispositionen und b) der Anpassung an die journalistischen Routinen der *Zeit*.

Introduction

Quantitative data analysis is seldom used in communication history research, mostly due to data collection issues (for important exceptions see for example Wilke 1984; Stöber 2012). On the other hand, methods such as frame analysis that offer more quantitative insights into communication patterns are lacking a historical dimension and are rarely analyzed on a longitudinal basis, also mainly due to data collection issues. The example of Helmut Schmidt (1918-2015) gives us an opportunity to analyze the journalistic work of a former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (1974-1982) and reveal his framing of German and international politics over three decades. We thereby combine a quantitative method – here a content and frame analysis of his journalistic work – with a historical perspective, namely Schmidt’s biographical background and the historic events occurring during his editorial work (1983-2013). In addition to a more comprehensive analysis of Schmidt’s journalistic work over several decades, this allows us to consider how quantitative methods – here cluster analysis applied to frame elements coded within a content analysis framework – might be helpful for historic research.

Shortly after he left office in 1982, Helmut Schmidt was offered the position of a co-editor at the influential weekly *Die Zeit* in his hometown Hamburg. He started his new job in May 1983 and since then published 281 articles; including 24 articles he had written for *Die Zeit* from 1962 to 1983, he has written a total of 305 articles until 2013. Schmidt has commented on the development of the European Union, the international financial crisis, and the role of the media in modern society. Before Schmidt died in 2015, the editor-in-chief of *Die Zeit*, Giovanni di Lorenzo (personal communication February 25, 2013), said that the political class in Germany carefully read Schmidt’s articles and after his death stated that *Die Zeit* considers Schmidt to be a “father figure” (di Lorenzo 2016, p. 4).

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the former Chancellor Schmidt commented on foreign policy, reflected on global economic issues, or talked about former companions or rivals throughout the course of time. In addition, it was analyzed if he used particular frames when doing so. This is especially interesting considering that *Die Zeit* is one of the biggest and most popular German weekly newspapers and Schmidt a well-known public figure; both had a vast influence on public opinion. Callaghan and Schnell (2010, p. 186) state that by

expressing opinions via particular frames, “political elites, the media, and other players can alter how an issue is understood and thus shift public opinion. In other words, political elites can effectively use frames to promote their own political ends.”

In this paper, we show that Schmidt used specific, repeatedly occurring frames within his journalistic work, with these frames being put into the context of his political background and the historic context he lived in.

Theoretical framework of the framing concept

The framing concept has been fruitful for communication scientists around the globe since the 1990s, especially in empirical studies when analyzing journalistic texts. Following Entman’s definition, four elements of frames can be identified: the definition of a problem, the diagnosis of causes, a moral judgment, and the suggestion of remedies (Entman 1993, p. 52, original emphasis):

“Frames, then, *define problems* – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* – identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. A single sentence may perform more than one of these four framing functions, although many sentences in a text may perform none of them. And a frame in any particular text may not necessarily include all four functions.”

The process of framing indicates the idea of highlighting some information and hiding other (Entman 1993; Matthes 2014, p. 12; Strömbäck & Aalberg 2008, p. 94). The literature further differentiates between issue-specific and generic (or basic) frames (de Vreese 2005; Matthes 2014), the latter describing argumentation structures within different news topics (Dahinden 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg 2008). Scholars have analyzed the occurrence and influence of these generic frames, such as horse-racing and strategic or game framing, with a focus on the political field to a remarkable extent (Aalberg, Strömbäck & de Vreese 2012; de Vreese, Peter & Semetko 2001; Iyengar, Norpoth & Hahn 2004; Rinke, Wessler, Löb & Weinmann 2013). Therefore, some authors state that generic frames are what mainly shapes political communication in the news (Rinke, Wessler, Löb & Weinmann 2013, pp. 474–475; Strömbäck & van Aelst 2010, p. 45) – in contrast to frames that relate to a specific topic. Issue-specific

frames are considered distinct from generic frames due to their in-depth analysis of content instead of focusing mainly on argumentative structures. These types of frames do not appear across different themes. Issue-specific frames are seldom researched within the field of political news coverage (but see for example Schuck & de Vreese 2006).

In our study, we argue that both more general argumentative structures, e.g. considering the consistent attribution of causes or solutions across topics, as well as in-depth content, e.g. specific topics or the appearance of different actors, play a vital role for the formation of frames. We thereby try to combine the advantages of both issue-specific and generic frames. To this end, the argumentation of Helmut Schmidt is analyzed across different political topics while also taking deeper-matter content-related aspects into account. This is done in a longitudinal way, as frames can change over time (Matthes 2014) or occur with different frequencies. Changes regarding frames are hard to analyze when only their appearance or non-appearance as a whole is measured and the concept of frames is thereby solidified to a steady construct. This is often the case in frame research, as Matthes (2009) shows in his meta-analysis – only 2 percent of studies analyzed frame dynamics over time. Empirical research, he claims (Matthes 2014), should understand frames as possibly changing over time and therefore use longitudinal research designs.

As of now, issue-specific frames are more often surveyed and measured outside the field of political communication (Kohring & Matthes 2002; Donk, Metag, Kohring & Marcinkowski 2012), where frames are detected during or even after the coding process with computer-assessed data-reduction techniques. This procedure has the clear advantage of identifying frames during the research process, not beforehand, and therefore minimizing the danger of assuming the existence of predefined frames in the news where they are in fact not occurring.

In our study, we try to find argumentative structures of the former Chancellor Schmidt without neglecting content-related information, but across different news topics. To consider both argumentative structures and the content of his journalistic work, the argumentation of Helmut Schmidt will be analyzed across different political topics while also taking deeper-matter content-related aspects into account that occur topic specific. We can demonstrate that, partly, the difference between generic and issue-specific frames as

theoretical concepts is marginal. Thereby, we try to overcome the disadvantages of simple issue-specific frames, such as their specification on or even restriction concerning certain topics (Borah 2011, p. 256), as well as the superficiality of generic frames.

This analysis of Schmidt's framing in the *Zeit* is then combined with an analysis of and connection to his political biography as a former strategic communicator, namely the German Chancellor. Not only might a journalist's personal interests and experiences have an influence on its reporting, especially on non-time sensitive coverage (Tanikawa 2016). By taking Schmidt's background into account, we thereby also try to dig into the so-called process of frame building (Scheufele 1999). In general, framing can be observed on the side of political actors, politicians, and spin-doctors and is then called strategic framing.

Journalists create, based on their own ideas, journalistic frames, while media frames can be identified from within media texts. The influence of strategic framing on journalistic framing and on media frames is then frame building. This process "refers to the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames" (de Vreese 2005, p. 52). Scheufele argues that research has not yet determined "how media frames are formed or the types of frames that result from this process" (1999, p. 115, original emphasis). Helmut Schmidt is a good example for the analysis of this process because he produced media frames as both a strategic political communicator *and* a journalistic communicator. To consider what influences his media frames, especially in their production process, we first have to take former Chancellor Schmidt's political background into account, especially its media related aspects.

Helmut Schmidt and the media

Helmut Schmidt can be regarded as one of the most media experienced politicians in German post World War II history (Soell 2008). Born in 1918, he grew up in an apolitical family in Hamburg where it was strictly forbidden for the kids to read the newspapers (Schmidt 1992a, p. 193). He was fourteen years old when Hitler and the National Socialists rose to power in 1933, and was a soldier during all of World War II. Afterwards, as a student of economics and a young Social Democrat, Schmidt wrote articles in left-wing newspapers in Hamburg, criticizing the conservative West German government for its communication policy (Birkner 2014).

From his early beginnings in politics in post war Western Germany, he was aware that the mass media were important for politicians. When he was elected a member of the second German Bundestag in 1953, an image film was played in the tube stations in his constituency (Soell 2004, p. 234). It is widely unknown that in the 1960s, Schmidt was a regular guest author in different tabloid papers in Munich and Cologne (Birkner 2014).

Thus, Schmidt was quite prepared to work with the media when the Social Democrats entered the government at the end of the 1960s, as well as when he became the fifth Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1974. In office, he went on with his open policy towards the press, allowing journalist Nina Grunenberg to accompany him for a period of four days in 1975. But Schmidt was also known for his media criticism and his frankness. In 1976, he was introduced to the *National Press Club* in Washington as “Schmidt the Lip” and responded: “Way back in medieval times there was the inquisition – today, there is the press” (Schmidt 1976). Still, in the biggest crises of his chancellery – the kidnapping of the President of the German Employers’ Association, Hanns Martin Schleyer, by German terrorists and the hijacking of a German airplane by Palestinian terrorists, both in the autumn of 1977 – the Schmidt administration cooperated with the media.

In 1982, after eight years as head of the German government, the media-conscious politician Schmidt had to leave office. On 31st December 1982, he was offered the position of co-editor at *Die Zeit* and on 1st May 1983 he started his new job in journalism (Soell 2008). Schmidt considered it a great opportunity to continually take part in the public debate (personal communication 2011). His colleagues at the *Zeit* remember him as a profound journalist who cleverly accessed his political networks and was therefore always seen as a former politician: “One thing is clear: He always stayed a Chancellor.” (Nass 2016, p. 20)

Some of his companions, like Theo Sommer (2010) and Peer Steinbrück (personal communication 2012), have argued that Schmidt’s articles always combine the definition of a problem with suggestions on how the problem can be fixed. Thus, many of his articles published in *Die Zeit* may almost perfectly fulfill the concept of framing.

Research questions

The intent of this study is to analyze how the former German Chancellor Schmidt commented on current issues and whether certain frames can be detected. Therefore, our research questions are:

Research Question 1: Which topics did the Chancellor most frequently comment on? On a purely descriptive level, we first try to summarize whether Schmidt wrote about specific topics as for example his political background would let to expect a focus on foreign politics, economics and Europe. Thereby, we are also interested in determining whether his experience with the media is in some way reflected in his news articles.

Research Question 2: Are there repeatedly occurring frames that structure his news articles' content and argumentation? If so, how can these be summarized? We thereby try to contribute to the question of whether or not Schmidt used specific frames for his articles and whether his political background might have influenced them. If Schmidt, for example, focused on himself as a political actor or negatively evaluated former political competitors related to his chancellorship, as his former competitor Helmut Kohl, one could argue that his journalistic work was strongly influenced by his political background. A more differentiated view on political topics, for example by considering various actors not solely within the field of politics, as well as balanced evaluations might hint at a more journalistic framing that is less dependent on his own political views.

Research Question 3: Does the occurrence of these frames change over time? As mentioned before, frames should not be understood as static constructs but probably occur with varying frequency in the course of time. This can only be studied with a longitudinal design.

Methodology

We operationalized our frame analysis based on Matthes and Kohring (Kohring & Matthes 2002; Matthes & Kohring 2008), and especially on the analysis of media frames by Donk, Metag, Kohring and Marcinkowski (2012). As suggested, not entire frames but frame elements were coded as single variables. Therefore, “the affiliation of the frame elements to a specific frame remains unknown” (Donk, Metag, Kohring & Marcinkowski 2012, p. 12) during the coding process which “increases the reliability of the analysis and enables the identification of new and modified frames” (Kohring & Matthes 2002). This method is

especially appropriate for highly complex issues (David, Atun, Fille & Monterola 2011, 346). As Schmidt writes about very different topics such as the financial crisis, the future of the European Union, German arms shipments or the deaths of former friends and public personalities, it seems even more interesting to look for overall framing patterns within these various topics and adequate to code these elements separately.

A total of 305 articles written by Helmut Schmidt between 1962 and 2013 was gathered by searching press and online archives of *Die Zeit* as well as the private archive of Helmut Schmidt. In two decades, from 1962 onwards, he had already published 24 articles in *Die Zeit* before he officially joined the paper in 1983. In his new position, by the end of 2013, he had written 281 articles in three decades. One last article from 2013 was included in this sample that was not yet included in another analysis (Birkner 2014; Birkner 2015a). Data gathering turned out to be quite complex as both mentioned sources and a bibliography were incomplete (Marbach & Nober 2008). Two coders performed the coding. The intercoder reliability, which has been a problem of frame research (Matthes 2009, 358–359), was tested by examining the concurrence of the coding of two interdependent coders on a randomly chosen ten percent of the sample ($N = 37$). The total reliability amounted to $CR = 0.8$. As the aim of this study is to analyze articles with a focus on Schmidt's journalistic and strategic framing, the sample had to be adjusted for the frame analysis that is used to answer the second and third research question. Therefore, book reviews, interviews with other persons, and articles that mainly focused on single persons in a non-journalistic manner, such as obituaries or birthday wishes, were excluded. A total of 242 articles formed the population of the frame analysis as research units.

The four elements of a frame defined by Entman (1993) were coded as shown in Table 1. A multitude of articles are characterized by the absence of certain elements, for example the absence of benefits or risks. As a frame might not include all four elements (Entman 1993, p. 52), the nonappearance of certain values was also included in the cluster analysis if meaningful and frequent.

[Table 1 around here]

The frame element *problem definition* consists of both the main topic as well as the evaluation of benefits and risks. Political themes, such as European policy, foreign affairs, and economics, distinguish this category. In addition, Schmidt mentioned political, social, economic, or military benefits and risks concerning these main topics. The protagonists responsible for benefits and risks form the *diagnosis of causes* as a second frame element. Both a person and an organization could concurrently be made responsible for a problem, as Schmidt often mentioned both. The *moral judgment* mainly includes the evaluation of the main topic, which could be positive, negative, or both. The fourth element, *suggestion of remedies*, consists of the causal attribution of remedies. The naming of either a person or an organization responsible for the solution was coded. Furthermore, the appearance of a concrete solution was analyzed. This variable was recoded based on different solutions named by Schmidt, such as “regulation”, “dialogue”, or “European integration”. For statistical reasons, only variables that occurred with a frequency of at least five percent were used for the cluster analysis (Donk, Metag, Kohring & Marcinkowski 2012, 14; Matthes & Kohring 2008, 268). Variables with a frequency of less than five percent would not have had any significant impact on the cluster solutions because they hardly occurred. Each of the used variables was transformed into a dichotomous one.

To determine the frames in the articles, a hierarchical cluster analysis using the Ward method based on the squared Euclidean distance was conducted. This algorithm is considered a good technique for providing accurate cluster solutions, as proved by several Monte Carlo experiments (Blashfield 1976; Breckenridge 2000; Edelbrock 1979; Edelbrock & McLaughlin 1980; Scheibler & Schneider 1985). The Ward method is especially known for creating solutions with minimal variance within the clusters (Blashfield 1976, 380).

With respect to both the so-called elbow criterion and the interpretability of the content, a five-cluster solution was determined. This solution was superior regarding both its clarity and its interpretability. To assure the validity of the cluster solution, the cluster analysis was repeated with another method. Using the usually similar efficient “Complete Linkage” algorithm (Blashfield 1976, 383-385; Breckenridge 2000, 278) and “Dice” as a convenient measure for binary data (Bacher 2010, 200; Schendera 2010, 31), the solution was proven stable. Three out of five clusters remained relatively identical. The remaining two clusters

were combined as one and an accumulative cluster was formed when using the “Complete Linkage” method. With regard to the content and its interpretability, the Ward method was therefore chosen for the subsequent analysis. As “method needs to be analytically distinguished from frame type” (Matthes 2009, p. 353) the solution can be called fairly independent from at least two different algorithms.

Findings

Regarding our first research question based on the full sample ($N = 305$), the analysis shows that Schmidt fulfilled the role of a journalistic commentator who explained and commented on current events rather than a neutral observer. The former Chancellor mainly published comments (67%), followed by articles focusing on specific persons, such as obituaries or birthday wishes (14%). Most of these articles are quite long ($M = 1619$ words, $SD = 1238$). His journalistic work focused on political and economic issues as well as specific persons: Among the most frequently topics are societal issues and specific persons (19%), European and monetary policy (13%), the economy (12%) and defense policy (11%). Not far behind follow topics such as foreign policy (9%), and policy regarding the German reunification (8%). Interestingly, Schmidt rarely mentioned the media as key issue – only seven articles deal with them explicitly. Nevertheless, when referring to the media within his articles – which he did in at least 19 percent of them – these media references are overwhelmingly negative: In 85 percent of the articles referring to the media, there is a negative evaluation. Over time, he is tentatively increasing his media references which are simultaneously becoming more negative.

With focus on our second research question and the restricted sample ($N = 242$), the cluster analysis determined five frames. As will be shown, Schmidt named concrete problems and diagnosis of causes, offers possible causal attributions and solutions in most of his articles. Each article could only be attributed to one frame. The name of the identified cluster, a short summary of its characteristics, and its frequency in the whole reporting are listed in Table 2. The biggest cluster includes 37 percent of all articles ($N = 90$), whereas the smallest cluster still consists of 11 percent of all articles ($N = 26$). The frequency of each variable within the different frames is illustrated in Table 3.

[Table 2 , Table 3 around here]

Frame I: “International political personalization.” The first frame occurs in 19 percent (N = 47) of the articles in the sample. Especially when commenting on issues within the field of international politics, Schmidt tended to personalize: When referring to political developments, he often named a specific person as being responsible for them. In more than half of all articles (62%), the former Chancellor referred to a specific person being responsible for benefits. A similar pattern occurs concerning the responsibility of risks (47%). We compared the occurrence of specific actors between frames using crosstabs. Percent values were calculated comparing the frequency of a specific protagonist solely to all other named persons or organizations. If Schmidt mentioned a person responsible for benefits, he is most frequently referring to himself (28%), whereas the subsequent German Chancellor Helmut Kohl is most frequently made responsible for risks (41%). Related to the focus on European policy, the European Union is most frequently mentioned as the responsible organization for benefits (44%) in comparison to other organizations.

Typical for this frame are articles in which Schmidt described the political fall or rise of nations based on their political leaders. He for example praised the democracy in Spain, which was in his view based on its successful king Juan Carlos (Schmidt 1986) or speculated about the political future of China due to reforms of Deng Xiaoping (Schmidt 1992b).

Frame II: “Balanced analysis of socio-economic developments.” Within this frame, Schmidt analyzed current issues from a broad range of topics in a very balanced manner. He mainly focused on problems with possible consequences for the society or the economy. The cluster consists of articles mentioning social or economic benefits and risks (N = 40; 17% of the sample). Helmut Schmidt often referred to these regarding the German reunification, but also economy in general and European policy. Connected with this are once again the (former) German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his government, who are predominantly made responsible for risks. If an actor is named, it is mostly Kohl (63%) or his government (32%). If any protagonist is made responsible for a solution, it is mainly one person, namely Kohl (56%), for whom Schmidt defined some kind of remedy in all articles within this frame. This

cluster is characterized by its argumentative structure: pros and cons are balanced and topics often evaluated. Schmidt's argumentation is defined by a socio-economic context, as he for example discussed the German reunification (Schmidt 1990) or the future of the European Union (Schmidt 2012).

Frame III: "Critical risk analysis." With regard to all articles in the third and biggest cluster (37%; N = 90), Schmidt discussed public risks and critical developments within the society. There is a relatively large width of different themes. Nevertheless, a certain focus on defense policy can be identified. Military risks are highlighted above average, but other risks, such as political or social ones, are underlined as well. Combined with the risk analysis, Schmidt evaluated most of the problems relatively negatively and less often positively. The suggestion of remedies is clearly structured: The author not only ascribes possible solutions to concrete persons and organizations frequently, but also calls for concrete remedies. This frame is therefore affected by its risk-centered view on topics such as the German export of armaments (Schmidt 2013) or the war in Afghanistan (Schmidt 2010). But still, Schmidt mentioned at least partly positive aspects for a variety of societal developments – other than in the following frame.

Frame IV: "Negativism regarding economics." Almost all articles in this frame (16%, N = 39) deal with economy or fiscal policy in a negative manner. Schmidt almost never referred to any benefits, but mentioned economic risks. His evaluation was always negative, whereas positive aspects were rarely recalled. Schmidt (1988) for example criticized Reagan's fiscal policy and asked: "In the end, who will have to pay the price for Reagan's years as head of government?"

Frame V: "Praise of a specific person." Most articles in this rather small frame (11%, N = 26) deal with specific persons or themes concerning the whole of society. Schmidt never mentioned any risks, but especially recalled political benefits when talking about the French politician Mitterrand (Schmidt 1987) or the former South-Korean president Kim Dae-Jung (Schmidt 2000). What is more, he often named a specific person responsible for the benefits and gave a quite positive evaluation without alluding to negative aspects. In accordance with this, concrete remedies were rarely referred to. This frame therefore differs from other frames by its less argumentative and rather personalized view on topics.

In our third research question, we asked whether frames used by the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt can be described as stable or changing in the course of time. To answer this question, we analyzed the appearance of the frames during his journalistic career by summarizing the publication date of each article to a five-year period, starting from 1983 to 1987, then 1988 to 1992, and so on. Here we start the comparison in 1983, when Schmidt became co-publisher at *Die Zeit*. Figure 1 shows the percentage of each frame's appearance in the particular time period compared to the other frames.

[Figure 1 around here]

The frame “Critical risk analysis” has been the most frequently used ($M = 37.7$, $SD = 7.1$), with one exception. During the years 1988 to 1992 the frames “International political personalization” ($M = 18.9$, $SD = 8.8$) and “Balanced analysis of socio-economic developments” ($M = 16.8$, $SD = 7.7$) were the most frequent, probably due to the German unification, its international implementations, and socio-economic consequences. After that, Schmidt's analysis of different topics with a focus on risk became more important, with a peak during the EU-crisis. The frame “Negativism regarding economics” ($M = 16.2$, $SD = 2.6$) is the most stable frame during the three decades analyzed, while the fifth frame, “Praise of a specific person” ($M = 10.5$, $SD = 6.4$), prominent at the beginning of Schmidt's journalistic career, disappeared between 1988 and 1992.

This time period, surrounding the German unification, seems to be special regarding Schmidt's framing of politics with the dominance of his “Balanced analysis of socio-economic developments” and “International political personalization”. Afterwards, “Critical risk analysis” became the predominant frame within his articles. This shift might be associated a) with the growing temporal distance to Schmidt personally being involved in political decision making, and b) with the enormous importance of the German reunification policy at the beginning of the 1990s and its economic and social consequences. Within the “balanced” frame, nine out of those eleven articles that deal specifically with the German reunification policy were written between 1989 and 1993. Nevertheless, Schmidt continued to concentrate on the social and economic analysis of different problems even years after the

German reunification in 1990. Also, between 2010 and 2012 nine of his 20 articles were dedicated to the European economic crisis.

Regarding our third research question, we can state that some of the frames are dependent on specific themes or historic events, such as the German reunification; others are occurring more steadily, maybe due to the fact that during the 1990s Schmidt finally found his journalistic style and his predominant style of framing.

Discussion and conclusion

Of course, analyzing one single case has its limitations. The number of articles in this analysis was, though a full sample survey, relatively small compared to other frame analyses. This is inevitable due to the fact that Schmidt simply has not written more articles in *Die Zeit*. In addition, the cluster analysis is – despite its statistical approach – a method to detect structures, not prove them mathematically. The result of each cluster analysis is also strongly dependent on the variables that are included. While our quantitative approach can detect frames in a more objective manner and track their occurrence over time, its explanatory power in terms of why Schmidt framed the way he did and how this framing is entangled with historic context is still limited. Here, historic research and especially qualitative methods such as discourse analysis are needed to extend the informative value of similar analysis. Nevertheless, the application of a longitudinal quantitative approach underlines its ability to track historic change – here in the field of journalistic and political communication – over time in a very deductive manner. While this approach might only partly deliver reasons and in-depth details in terms of Schmidt's journalistic work with this limited sample, its application could be more useful for a broader sample – e.g. framing in political speeches and their change over time.

One of the major intellectual problems of framing research is the differentiation between strategic framing, journalistic framing, and media frames and their complex and yet unknown interconnections. In most studies, one or the other has been investigated, ignoring the other two, even knowing that they must be players in the same game. In a way, the media frames of Schmidt include his journalistic and strategic framing. As Noakes and Johnston believe, strategic framing is less “about the creation of new ideas or the

presentation of the greatest truth, but splicing together of old and existing ideas and the strategic punctuating of certain issues, events or beliefs” (2005, p. 8).

Our first research question asked which topics the former Chancellor Schmidt commented on. As this analysis has shown, his political background first and foremost influenced his journalistic work as he mainly commented on political and economic issues and kept his critical view regarding the media. Based on our second research question, we analyzed whether or not Helmut Schmidt was using frames to report on German and international politics. With regard to our cluster analysis, this question can be answered positively. Not only did we find a high frequency of problem definitions, diagnosis of causes, moral judgments, and suggestion of remedies, but these different elements could also be combined to consistent and plausible frames. It was shown that the former Chancellor had his own way of discussing political and economic questions. This paper shows that framing – in this case regarding media frames – is built on the author’s own background, with Schmidt being an extreme example.

For instance, the way Schmidt most often connected his former competitor Helmut Kohl to possible risks in the 1990s shows that Schmidt was not only a journalist, but also a political communicator, always considering his political context and thereby promoting himself – as can be seen by the fact that he named himself as responsible for possible benefits regarding foreign policy and European politics more often than any other actor. In our interview, Schmidt said that he considered his journalistic work first and foremost a political task (personal communication 2011). Regarding our third research question, concerning the frames’ occurrence over time, our analysis shows that specific frames were very dependent on the occurrence of historic events, showing that his argumentation was deeply involved with historical context.

Based on the research about Schmidt (Soell 2004, 2008; Birkner, 2014, 2015b) and his image in the public as a very self-conscious and media-conscious politician, it is not highly surprising that he framed himself as being capable of solving different kinds of problems and his successor Helmut Kohl as the cause of several problems. Nonetheless, it is striking that he saw Kohl not only as the reason for problems in national and international politics, but also as a potential solution. It seems presumable that this is connected with Kohl’s politically

successful handling of the German unification in 1990. Kohl, who died less than two years after Schmidt in June 2017, was respected, also by Schmidt, for his handling of the reunification within the European project. Especially in times of the Euro crisis, it is remarkable how Schmidt stressed the potential of the European Union as being capable of solving ongoing problems.

This analysis was able to disclose two things: On the one hand, the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt used specific frames for his journalistic commenting in *Die Zeit*, which are strongly influenced by his political background. That might have influenced the weekly's readers and their reception of political news. On the other hand, although repeating patterns can be found in his articles, his framing also varied with time, especially concerning specific political and historic events. This underlines that both Schmidt's journalistic and strategic framing was influenced by external factors. On a methodological level, the study demonstrates the strengths but also weaknesses of a quantitative content analysis with journalistic texts from more than three decades for communication history research. Additionally, it illustrates the benefit of connecting such analyses with historical context, in this case Schmidt's biographical background and the occurrence of historic events influencing him. In a next step, further research might operate with larger samples, especially as access to journalistic coverage has become easier via digitalization of newspapers. Also, while a quantitative analysis is useful for identifying and describing overall communication patterns over time as a first step, it should then be complemented by more qualitative methods of text analysis for selected articles to even further put this analysis into a historical context.

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Table 1. Operationalization of Frame Elements

| Frame Element | Categories | Selected variables for the cluster analysis |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Problem definition | Main topic | Fiscal policy Foreign policy Defense policy Economy Policy regarding the German reunification European policy Society/people |
| | Evaluation of benefits | No benefits mentioned Political benefits Social benefits Economic benefits |
| | Evaluation of risks | No risks mentioned Political risks Social risks Economic risks Military risks |
| Diagnosis of causes | Causal attribution of responsibility | Person responsible for benefits mentioned Organization responsible for benefits mentioned Person responsible for risks mentioned Organization responsible for risks mentioned |
| Moral judgment | Evaluation of main topic | Positive evaluation Negative evaluation |
| Suggestion of remedies | Causal attribution of remedies | Person responsible for remedy mentioned Organization responsible for remedy mentioned |
| | Concrete solution | Remedies mentioned |

Table 2. Frequency of frames in Schmidt's articles

| Clusters | Short description | Frequency |
|--|--|-----------|
| International political personalization | Critical political discussion related to a specific person | 19.4 % |
| Balanced analysis of socio-economic developments | Analysis with socio-economic focus and concrete remedies | 16.5 % |
| Critical risk analysis | Risk-centered analysis with focus on military problems and concrete remedies | 37.2 % |
| Negativism regarding economics | Negative analysis of financial themes with organizational responsibility | 16.1 % |
| Praise of a specific person | Positive political evaluation of a specific person without argumentative structure | 10.7 % |

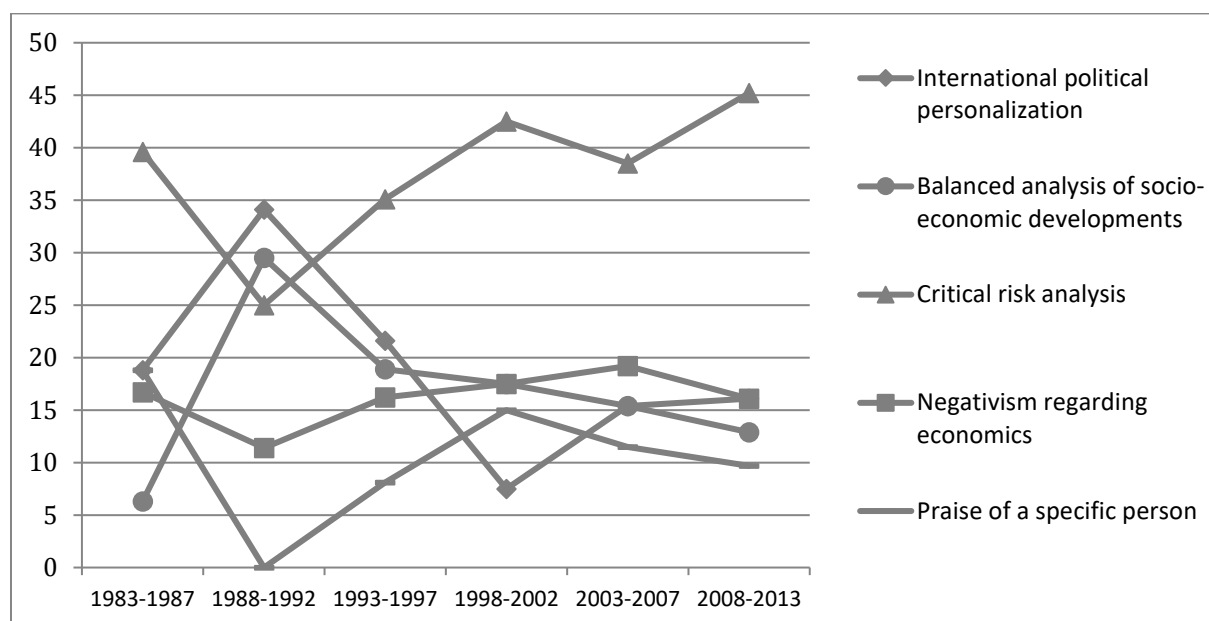
Table 3. Description of frames in Schmidt's articles

| Frame Element | Selected variables for the cluster analysis | Frame I | Frame II | Frame III | Frame IV | Frame V |
|---------------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Problem definition | <i>Main topic</i> | | | | | |
| | Fiscal policy | 2.1 | 10.0 | 1.1 | 28.2 | - |
| | Foreign policy | 27.7 | - | 10 | - | 15.4 |
| | Defense policy | - | - | 26.7 | - | - |
| | Economy | 2.1 | 20 | 7.8 | 48.7 | - |
| | Policy regarding the German reunification | 10.6 | 27.5 | 6.7 | - | 3.8 |
| | European policy | 34.0 | 20 | 12.2 | 5.1 | 7.7 |
| | Society/people | 8.5 | 2.5 | 2.2 | - | 50 |
| | <i>Benefits</i> | | | | | |
| | No benefits mentioned | - | 10 | 93.3 | 97.4 | 15.4 |
| | Political benefits | 87.2 | 20 | 1.1 | - | 61.5 |
| | Social benefits | 2.1 | 22.5 | 1.1 | - | 7.7 |
| | Economic benefits | 6.4 | 35 | - | - | 3.8 |
| | <i>Risks</i> | | | | | |
| | No risks mentioned | 2.1 | 7.5 | 8.9 | - | 100 |
| | Political risks | 83.0 | 5 | 38.9 | 2.6 | - |
| | Social risks | - | 37.5 | 17.8 | 2.6 | - |
| | Economic risks | 14.9 | 45 | 2.2 | 87.2 | - |
| | Military risks | - | - | 23.3 | - | - |
| Diagnosis of causes | <i>Causal attribution of responsibility</i> | | | | | |
| | Person responsible for benefits mentioned | 61.7 | 35 | 4.4 | - | 53.8 |
| | Organization responsible for benefits mentioned | 34.0 | 27.5 | - | 2.6 | 23.1 |
| | Person responsible for risks mentioned | 46.8 | 40 | 40 | 28.2 | - |
| | Organization responsible for risks mentioned | 70.2 | 70 | 61.1 | 97.4 | - |
| Moral judgment | <i>Evaluation of main topic</i> | | | | | |
| | Positive evaluation | 93.6 | 85 | 31.1 | 2.6 | 96.2 |
| | Negative evaluation | 93.6 | 100 | 96.7 | 100 | 7.7 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|------|------------|-------------|-------------|------|
| Suggestion of remedies | <i>Causal attribution of remedies</i> | | | | | |
| | Person responsible for remedies mentioned | 23.4 | 45 | 31.1 | 20.5 | 11.5 |
| | Organization responsible for remedies mentioned | 59.6 | 77.5 | 85.6 | 79.5 | 3.8 |
| | <i>Concrete solution</i> | | | | | |
| | Remedies mentioned | 91.5 | 100 | 98.9 | 97.4 | 23.1 |

Note: Variables which were definitive for each frame are listed in bold. The variables do not sum up to 100 percent because only variables with a frequency of more than five percent were included in the cluster analysis

Figure 1. Frames in Schmidt's journalistic articles



Note: The frequency of the frames was calculated using the percentage of coverage within each interval compared to the other frames. Also, the time segment from 2008-2013 consists of a six- instead of a five-year period in difference to the other segments, but only two articles written in 2013 were included in this analysis.